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SUBJECT: DONOR INTERACTION WITH OPPOSITION AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
ON PARLIAMENTARY STALEMATE

REF: (A) EARLIER MEETING WITH OPPOSITION (SEPTTEL) (B) MASERU 35

CLASSIFIED BY: JUNE CARTER PERRY, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) With May 24 Parliamentary action pending, opposition leader General Lekhanye (Secretary General of BNP) called Ambassador for an "urgent" meeting last week. We met May 18 (see septel) to hear his complaint that despite a petition to the Speaker of Parliament, a lower level BNP official attended a September 2005 SADC Parliamentary Forum. He also charged that House Leader, Deputy Prime Minister Lehohla, condemned the BNP on the floor and called for a 5-10 month expulsion of the BNP's leadership. This action would effectively remove the BNP from participating in national 2007 elections.

¶2. (C) Ambassador urged BNP representatives to make sure they had all the facts correct, to seek an audience with the speaker and to remain active in the democratic process (i.e., do not threaten boycotts). We also stated that, as we had done during the 2005 elections, we and other development partners would deliver the same message to the GOL - elections had to include all parties, be free, fair and transparent. (Note: The BNP leaders also met with the Irish Ambassador, who represented the EU members, and the UN Resident Representative. All of us encouraged them to meet with us as a group rather than going from mission to mission with the same message. End Note.)

¶3. (C) My donor colleagues and I conferred and called on the Deputy Prime Minister May 23 to try to ascertain the GOL's side of the story. The DPM denied BNP allegations that the Speaker had refused to meet but had, in fact, received a petition that was then "under siege" in her office by elements of the youth league of the BNP for three hours. He was, in our view, defensive, saying the BNP should be "punished" for such action which he alleged were similar to inciting disruptions in 1994 and 1998 which resulted in political/civil unrest. At the same time, he said, the situation and pending May 24 parliamentary actions were not "irretrievable." We recommended a negotiated settlement between the majority LCD party and the BNP to avoid parliamentary/electoral crises. (Comment: In late May 24 meeting with Finance Minister Thahane, Ambassador learned the Prime Minister had called for an emergency party caucus that evening, presumably to address this matter. End Comment.)

¶4. (C) Following our donor meeting with the DPM, we asked the BNP leaders to meet with development partners (U.S., Irish, UN) early May 23 to advise them that we had delivered the same message of open negotiations among all parties during the May 24 Parliamentary meeting. The BNP leader (former head of the military regime in Lesotho) denied they had "besieged" the speaker, but had demonstrated two blocks away. We pressed for

rational discussion of the facts as an important tactic on the floor. The Irish Ambassador (Paddy Fay) told the BNP there's no sense in "winning a battle and losing the war." The UN Rep (Mrs. Hodan Haji-Mohamud) noted (as we had done before) that the donor community was not to interfere in internal politics, but was present to support democratic and economic progress; without such progress, she added, donors could not operate. We cited the extreme situation in Zimbabwe which had led to distress for its citizens and withdrawal of donor assistance. Such a situation was unnecessary in Lesotho where the fledgling democracy had demonstrated the capability of adherence to democratic practices and rule of law.

15. (C) Comment: We are continuing our efforts to have Lesotho's leaders of all stripes look forward, not backward, and avoid unnecessary confrontation. The outcome of parliamentary and intra party discussions should be available soon and we anticipate further exchanges with various party representatives, likely at their request following internal discussions. End Comment.

PERRY